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AMEMBASSY MINSK SENDS
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SUBJECT: BELARUS' DECREED TIMELINE FOR 2008 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

REF: MINSK 111

Summary and Comment

¶1. (SBU) In a June 24 decree, President Lukashenko confirmed the date of September 28, 2008, for parliamentary elections and set a timeline of related events. This timeline mirrors those previewed in press statements by Central Election Commission Chair Lidiya Yermoshina (reftel). While Lukashenko said June 25 that Belarus wants to "show both the West and Russia how to hold elections," and GOB officials have continually pledged to hold free and fair elections, assessments of the elections will remain subject to the regime's implementation of its complex election laws. Nonetheless, the GOB will likely adhere to the following timetable of events related to the 2008 parliamentary elections. End summary and comment.

Elections Timetable

¶2. (SBU) The electoral timetable is as follows.

-- June 24: Announcement of the Poll by Lukashenko

By law the president must announce the poll no later than four months before the term of the previous parliament expires. The previous parliament was sworn in November 17, 2004. In reality, this announcement could come much earlier.

-- June 30: The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) informs Central Election Commission (CEC) of the List of Registered Parties with the Right to Nominate Candidates

Within five days after the announcement of the election by the president, the MOJ must submit a list to the CEC with the names of all the parties that can submit candidates. Political parties must be registered by the Ministry of Justice for six months prior to the president's proclamation of the date of the election to be eligible to nominate candidates.

-- July 14: Formation of District Electoral Commissions

Oblast legislatures and oblast executive committees must form 9-13 member electoral commissions for each of Belarus' 110 parliamentary electoral districts at least 75 days before the election is held. Representatives of registered political parties, social organizations and workers collectives can take part. A private citizen can also be nominated to serve in this capacity; he or she must secure the signatures of 100 voters from the district.

-- July 24: Registration of Citizen/Worker Initiatives

Initiative groups of at least ten citizens can form to nominate candidates by collecting signatures. A would-be candidate must register his or her initiative group with the district's electoral

commission no later than 65 days before the poll. The commission has five days from the date of submission to rule on the application of the initiative group. In the event of denial, the group can appeal to the courts within three days. If the group is approved, it is issued identification and signature lists on which it must collect 1,000 signatures from voters within the electoral district in order to draft a candidate.

-- July 20-August 18: Nomination of Candidates

In the period from seventy days to forty days prior to the election, parties can nominate one candidate per electoral district from among their own membership. This nomination must be submitted to the district's electoral commission no later than August 19. In similar fashion, initiative groups must submit their lists of 1,000 valid signatures to district electoral commissions no later than August 19.

-- August 13: Formation of Precinct Electoral Commissions

City and rayon executive committees must form 5-19 member precinct electoral commissions at least 45 days before the poll. As with district commissions, party members, representatives of social organizations or workers' collectives, and private citizens can serve as members. To be considered for membership in a precinct electoral commission, private citizens must collect at least 10 signatures from voters.

-- August 19-August 28: Registration of Candidates by District Electoral Commissions

-- August 19: Registration of Candidates' Proxies

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Candidates can submit lists of up to 15 proxies to district electoral commissions for registration. Once a proxy list is received, district electoral commissions have three days to confirm them and to grant proxies identification. Proxies participate in the electoral campaign, representing the candidate both to potential voters and to state bodies.

-- August 19-September 10: Appeal in the Event of Denial of Registration

In the event of denial of registration of a candidate, the would-be candidate or party has three days within which to appeal the decision to the CEC. The CEC has three days to rule on the appeal. Likewise, a negative ruling by the CEC can be appealed within three days to the Supreme Court of Belarus. The Supreme Court has three days to rule and its decision is final.

-- September 7: Candidates Submit their Campaign Programs to the CEC

Registered candidates have the right to submit a two-page electoral program or platform for publication in the state media. This must be done no later than 20 days prior to the election.

-- September 17: Voters Informed of the Polling Day

By law, voters must be informed of the date, time and precinct location for the election at least ten days before the poll. This is usually done by mail.

-- September 23-27: Early Voting Begins

Voters who can not be present at the polls on election day, like students and members of the military, are permitted to vote starting no less than five days before the election. (Note: In practice the government employs pressure and incentives to encourage a majority of registered voters to turn out early. End note.) Polling stations are open seven hours during each day, and must be attended by two members of the precinct electoral commission.

-- September 28: Election Day

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Cloud